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Guest Notebook

Our water infrastructure needs help

Premium content from Philadelphia Business Journal by Jeff Sterba

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The presidential election provides a rare chance to stand together and support a bipartisan cause affecting every American — the desperate need to invest in our nation's water infrastructure. While the candidates have touched on infrastructure investment as a way to generate jobs, water infrastructure has largely been missing from the conversation.

Meanwhile, the widespread deterioration of America's water infrastructure is reaching a critical stage. There are 700,000 miles of pipes, nationwide, and, on average, water infrastructure that was meant to last 50 years is being replaced every 250 years — the equivalent of replacing pipes today that were laid when [Thomas Jefferson](#) was president.

With this crisis comes incredible opportunity; 40 years of experience proves that investing in water infrastructure creates jobs and boosts the nation's economy. With millions of Americans out of work, the timing could not be better to reinvest in our essential water infrastructure.

That's why American Water is joining others in the industry to send a message to Congress and the president that investing in water is an investment in America. It creates good-paying jobs and ensures safe and reliable water, which attracts and retains industry, businesses, and qualified workers.

Water infrastructure investment protects the public's health and quality of life. According to a recent report by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), the breakdown of our water systems can result in water disruptions, impediments to emergency response, and damage to other types of infrastructure, as well as water shortages (from failing infrastructure and drought). This may result in unsanitary conditions, which increase the likelihood of public health issues.

The ASCE report also noted that failure to make the necessary investments may lead to \$206 billion in increased costs for businesses and households between now and 2020, and unless the infrastructure deficit is addressed by 2040, 1.4 million jobs could be at risk.

The American Water Works Association's recently released report Buried No Longer documents

the need for \$1 trillion of investment in the next 25 years to ensure the continued viability of underground drinking water systems, and the health, economic vitality, and fire protection that is supported by them.

It has been well-documented that repairing water infrastructure leads to the creation of a significant number of jobs in this country. According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, of which Philadelphia Mayor [Michael Nutter](#) is president, \$6 billion in infrastructure investment would yield 244,000 jobs annually. And a study by the Economic and Policy Institute, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, suggested that expenditures on water infrastructure alone could lead to the creation of more than a million jobs over the course of the next five years.

Water infrastructure investment protects the public's health and quality of life, while simultaneously promoting innovative technologies that keep America competitive.

During the recent political conventions, both parties adopted platform language recognizing the economic importance of clean, safe water. We need to make sure these promises don't collect dust after the election, and want to work with our elected officials to put America back to work by making water a top priority.

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